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The Woman and the Sage + and + other + Poems

by O. A. Joergens

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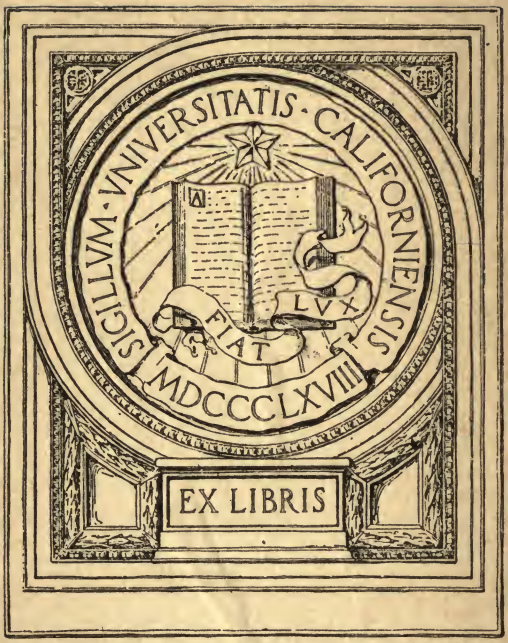
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The Woman
& the Sage

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M A N C H E S T E R

The Woman & the Sage

And other Poems

By

O. A. Joergens

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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THE WOMAN AND THE SAGE

A BALEFUL hollow tree-besprent
Where wailing willows spake their woes,
And hardly fell the sun by day,
Or moon or star aft' sunset close.

A sunken fountain scent-embalmed
Lay low and slow and wondrous sad,
Where lilies dreamed, and gnat-wings droned,
And bowering trees were night yclad.

And down the motionless water fell,
And down and down the glassy way
The shadow of the Sage with eyne
Upcast by night, and down by day;

And muttering, muttering hour on hour
The wisdom from behind the morn,
He smoothed his beard, and wrung his hands,
And groaned in reverie forlorn.

His brow was pleached with many a line,
The mantle agèd at his side;
And 'neath his feet the grass out-curved,
Grew straight and strong, bore fruit, and died.

And still he sat, and still he spake,
And still the sun went to and fro;
Nor smiled he at the spring's uprise,
Nor sighèd he to see her go.

Then through the shade and down the glade,
Unto the fountain's silvern brim,
A child—as 'twere an elfin's child—
Came leaping, laughing up to him.

She held a flower like amethyst,
  And the leaves were greened with magic paint;
Deep in her eyne were glooming smiles,
  And her feet did stumble not nor faint.

An elf, a lissome, fabulous elf,
  With leagues of starlight in a smile—
"A king-flower of the world!" quoth she,
  And 'gan the ancient to beguile.

She drew him from erosive dreams,
  And thoughts and arts withouten end,
And as an angel's lutany
  Her voice did through the twilight wend.

"A child, a child!" he said, and smiled,
  "With heart upon a fairy flower!
There's not a toy in all the world
  But has its one belovèd hour."

He held his thought, she held her flower,
  And the universe lay in between:
And down her shadow sank with his
  Into the fountain's fixèd sheen.

And half a score of years went by,
  And wanly at the water's edge
Still sat the Sage with furrowed mien,
  And gazed into the lilied sedge.

Then down beneath the black-bud ash,
  And through the grasses lush and long,
They came who had drunk of ichor wine,
  And sung the planets' morning song.

They stepped beneath the wailful boughs,
  And up the winds the sunset bare;
They sought unto each other's eyne
  And life and death were folden there.

The witchèd tarn lay at their feet,
  The shimmering bluebells purpled wide;
She leaning on his bosom breathed:
  "The kingliest knight had ever bride!"

The Sage he chuckled pensively,
  And smoothed his beard and raised his head,
And looking down the bracken aisle:
  "How is the flower forgot!" he said.

She turned to him, "Eftsoons it died,
  But I have got me a lordlier dower."
"A child, a child!" quoth he and smiled,
  "With heart upon a lordlier flower!"

Then after the happy summer fled—
  A yearly night, a spring anew—
She came again, she came alone,
  And bare an infant pale as dew.

She knelt beside the Aged Man,
  The weary babe slept deep enow;
She murmured in its happy dreams:
  "Was ever infant loved as thou!"

"Say, child, how is thy knight forsook?"—
  A world of woe did shake her breast—
"Now nay," she breathed, "a child no more!
  He loves me not, who loves not best."

He lookèd where the sullen tarn
  Lay low and slow and wondrous sad;
"A child, a child!" said he, "beguiled
  By perishing blossom of the sod."

And yet again the years went by,
  And with the years she came again,
In solemn weed, with cypress meed,
  A spirit crowned with kingly pain.

"My arms are empty, lover and child
  Have passed beyond love's escalade."
"I see the love-light in thine eye,
  Oh say whereon thy heart is laid?"

"I found a voice for all my sorrow,
  A song that bore its edge away;
I sing it in the lonely places
  And the world listens day by day."

The stars dripped through the wreathen boughs,
  Were lights upon the silent tarn;
"A child, a child, by love reviled!
  Nor life, nor change, nor death can warn."

Once more, and never after, came
  The mystic footstep down the night,
She paused amid the lilied sedge
  And looked unto the eremite.

A woman now, with moonlight brow,
  And starlit smiles of buried woe:
"I loved the song my soul had chosen,
  I loved it, loved it long ago;

"But weary grew the world of listening,
  The world was drifting from my side,
And weary, weary grew the soul of singing,
  And soft upon my heart it died."

The Sage looked up from all his dreams,
  His thoughts and arts withouten end;
"Then Love and thou have parted ways;
  Thou seëst whither his steps bend."

And feebly rose he to his feet,
  And feebly stretched his arm for aid;
"Now nay," she breathed, "the world is wide,
  And in my heart the world is laid."

And twain were on the lighten marge,
  And twain looked down the mystic tide;
Three shadows in the water lay—
  The angel at the woman's side.

REFLECTIONS

WHEN fares the sun from his resplendent hall,
As hordes of guilty phantoms in strong flight
The shadows, and the twilight, and the night
Flee hence, that where his golden glance shall fall
Light, glory, splendour beam reciprocal;
He sees it so because he is pure light,
And where we look even to the infinite
We see but our reflections over all.
Do I find good in you, it is mine own,
Or evil, still the semblance is of me,
And from my bosom as the eternal throne
Go forth the beauties that mine eyes do see;
There's nought in all the world I dare condemn,
All are supreme in me, and I in them.

THE GARDEN OF MYSTERY

BEHIND, the orange sunset, then a fall
Of windless trees that no breath stirs,
And purpling banks, 'neath the gold-cleaving heads
Of strange and cabalistic firs.
A shadowy space where phantom thickets bear
Exotic buds, and in white domes
A pathway of pale flowers long and low
Where the dumb soul of wonder roams.
And in a mazy dance, with tossing arms
The oriental grasses leap
Against the deepening west, while silken winds
The threshold of the twilight keep.
Strong birds with breasts aglow skim over it,
The doves sit close in woven bowers,
While night's caressing language sinks and falls
As dew in the deep-bosomed flowers.
All in the nameless purple, star on star
Flings forth its tale of fire, and all
The legends from the birth-song of the world
Pace through the garden's evenfall.
Can the rose learn? or the winged bird declare?
Have the star-hearts been bold to see
The Ever and the Never hovering there
I' the garden of long mystery?

AFTER MANY YEARS

OH we loved each other blindly
In the way of youth,
For the light of our illusions
Did out-glory truth;

And we trod again the Eden
That the angels know,
When we found the land where only
The belovèd go.

But we left the gold doors open
And the world came in,
And they crushed the flow'rs forever
Where their feet could win;

Till you missed on me the halo
Of the May-day gleam,
And I looked in vain to find me
The Knight of my dream.

"1915"

I.

I LOOKED and saw.
And the world was weltering in blood,
And the bulwarks of life were shaken,
Crowns fell, and hearts were broken—
And time went on.
A cry clove up the heavens,
A great and terrible cry,
And they laid them down to die
Who had fought with the stars in their courses,
And held back the seas with their hands;
Who had strained their eyes in the midnight,
And their lips with a terrible cry—
They laid them down to die.
And the spring came forth on the world,
And over the blood was the hawthorn,
And low on the grave was a flow'r—
A foe and a foe nigh sleeping
With between them only a flow'r.
The cry was weakened with tears,
The earth was sickened with blood,
And ever the sun grew warmer,
And the birds' song covered a groan.
And I turned from the world in her anguish
With my heart grown weary of death.

II.

I looked and saw.
And the heavens were over the earth,
And the planets and orbs were coursing
In circles of infinite space,
Away from the shaking and breaking
And shudd'ring of agony;
From eternity into eternity,
From the endless past to the endless future,
They held their way.
And high in the throbbing arch
Past creeds and faiths departed
Swept on with banner and song,
With triumph and desolation
Upholding the spirit of man,
A company wearing the saffron robe,
With the mystic bowl in their hands—
And a light went forth from them.
A company marching along
With sword and fire and death,
And they cried: "For the Faith and Allah!"—
And a light went forth from them.
A company clomb the mountains,
And kindled their fire with eyes upturned,
And looked on the sun—
And a light went forth from them.
The faiths swept by . . . .
A little they paused in the east . . . .
And they crumbled to dust and ashes,
And their light went forth on the heavens
In a great and mystical Cross—
The light of the faiths and the souls of men
Went up in a mystical Cross.

III.

I covered mine eyes—
Earth was too terrible
And heaven too great for me.
I turned from the chaos without me,
The awe and the anguish about me,
To the holy of holies within—
The place and the shrine of the soul;
But the whole of the wonder of heaven
And the crime of the world was there.
The altar was drenched in blood,
The lights had flickered and failed,
And the sign and the signet of faith
Was fallen away in the night.
The holy vessels were perished,
The windows were darkened,
And the inmost shrine of the soul
Was forsaken and desolate.
To the woe of earth and the awe of heaven,
All the incense I offered
Was the incense of tears.

IV.

I looked and saw.
A lily grown in the night,
And its sheath was white:
Seven flow'rs were on the stem
And some that were yet to be,
And the hearts of the seven were golden—
And the hearts that were yet to be?
They were golden, too, ah, verily,
They were all golden too!
And clear on one holy petal
Lay the universe or a globe of dew.
And 'neath God's Eye
One man stretched forth for a crown,
And the globe was red with blood;
And one man with an angel mien
Stood steadfastly—
And the blood swept round, and the blood swept over,
But he stood steadfastly.
And I heard God's Voice:
"Poor children, they forget.
One has erred, and many have erred,
And there is more dew than the dew in a flow'r
And the sun shall reclaim it all."

ART

THERE'S poetry beyond the pen of man
Lies sleeping at the bosom of the morn,
And songs at the world's heart, unsung, unborn,
And silent to our ears since time began.
The rushing winds the bardic voice foreran
Uttering supernal poems, and the lorn
Deep-thundering, world-old sea hath overborne
The epic harmonies by Milton won.
We worshippers of Beauty, through disguises
Of Death, and Penury, and Heart's Decay,
Still struggle onwards in the great campaign
To achieve our frail creations; then arises
The infinite Beauty of the dying day—
We lift our eyes, and know our work is vain.

THE LARK AT DAWN

SINGING on the stairs of heaven
With the red clouds gathering round thee,
By the pulse of strong bliss driven
From the bonds that one time bound thee;
I adjure thee in thy heart-compelling rapture
Teach my soul the language thy joy found thee!
Wings that yearn from all collision
With the dying world to sever,
Raptured strains in high submission
Singing into the forever;
Bring me tidings from thy antenatal vision
Whence the far-off fountain of song's river!
With the dew like fire upon thee
Up the crystal sunrise winging,
Oh, the depths thy bliss hath won thee,
And the glory round thee clinging!
Tell me, spirit, whither thy song goeth,
And the end of singing, singing, singing. . .

IRREVOCABLE

LIFE came to us—we did not ask to take it;
It passes on—in vain to murmur "Why?"
There is a space betwixt the dawn and even
To cope with it, to triumph, and to die.

Each soul its creed has and its aspirations,
There is no rigid type on all impressed,
Who nighest to the light of his ideals
Uplifts the sordid days—he liveth best.

To me there is a unity and kinship
To which all living nature corresponds,
And never shines the sun, but as a harp-string
Touched deeply, all my inner life responds;

And in the glory of perpetual ardour
Renewed, refreshed, each day is victory;
And should I fighting fall, I ask not whither—
Within the living past is place for me.

THE GOD-MESSAGE OF THE POETS

THOU hast been with them through the lights and nights
Of days agone; thy hand had power to purple,
As 'twere for crownèd kings, their dust-grown way,
And steep the meanest weed in stars from heaven.
Thy wings have beat upon the chords of life
And waked melodious strains from times o'er-past,
Till they inbreathed the music self-existent,
Creationless, and indestructible
In thy soul's soul; 'til theme and time and vista
Amid thy royalty magnifical
Did stand unnatured, and from earth to heaven
Was not a worm, feature deformed, or cloud,
Or wrack on the wave's wash, but streamed triumphant
Thy glory to the cornered winds of earth.
Oh, had the lip a song, the tongue a voice,
Or were the heart grown great enough to hold
The tongueless, lipless ocean of thy might!
The soul is ever ready, and thy call
In the dusk hours, or through the sun's going down
Can bear it up—oh, voiceless mystery!—
On golden wings knit from thy scattered plumes,
Through seas of light fallen from thy sleepless eyes,

Till the earth sinks, and through the æons of
space
It scales the high hills of eternity,
One note in the great chorus, where the suns
Unto infinity respond.

But so,
As the spirit waxes and goes forth in flame,
The body—that poor medium—from whose white
And quivering lips the great thoughts scarcely
fall,
That channel from eternity to time,
That mouthpiece of the gods—it breaks! it
breaks!
The courier from the heavens hath fallen down,
The tidings hardly uttered, and the word
Stifled upon his heart. The gods' behest
Was great as is the lightning in the deeps;
Their language meteors riven from the night,
Beyond communication. This poor reed,
This fragment of mortality, hath fallen,
The eternal words upon him, and awhile
A struggling syllable of divinity
Dying upon his lips. So is the crown
Blood-stained, the viol marred with tears! so
stand
The cypress and the laurel intertwined
For ever and for ever! As the sword
Of Azrael, so is the message given,
And he who holds it in his bosom, bears
The asphodel upon his living brow.

THE YEARLY MIRACLE

AVAUNT! avaunt!
Vain phantom of the night!
Thy latest valediction
Is the utmost of thy might,
For through the world's amaze
The great prelusive anthem of the year
Sweeps down the nights and days.

Phantasmal care,
Nursling of darkest hours,
The weariness of living
Is the measure of thy powers;
Yet can we scorn thy ruth,
For as we gaze into the heart of spring
We find eternal youth.

The year is new,
O wonderful new year!
The glory of past summers,
And the future's light are here;
Upon the hearts of men,
And the bare earth, are crownlets of fresh
flow'rs
And hopes new-wreathed again.

What is't to us,
Time's mournfullest decree?
And if a thousand ages
Usher in the things that be?
Still can the heavens impend,
And as the lark, so shall the soul of man
From age to age ascend.

Life leaves its grave,
For spring can call it thence,
And imaged in her bosom
She holds life's recompense.
In this her vernal hue,
And in the rapture of a mystic smile
The heart of earth is new.

CHILDREN AT PLAY

I SAW them playing at the door of life.
And the threshold it was paven
With the light from the sun's haven,
The glitter and the glimmer of the aspen's silver leaf.

And I beheld the sparkle in the eyes
At the sun's light looking only,
While the shadows faint and lonely
Went floating, fading, flitting in the children's revelries.

I saw them playing on the stairs of Fate,
Echoes crowding through the portal,
Laughter from the spring immortal
In dancing, daring music o'er the passion-ways of hate.

I heard them utter wiser things than Truth,
Making songs of meditation,
And the joy of life's creation,
As I turned away and left them in the light of youth.

A FRAGMENT

SIT by me, sweet, and let me clasp your hand,
And feel the thrill of a new world about me
Which you alone can give; thus close and close,
As if for ever, and the pulses' throb—
Mine fevered, yours so still—shall beat as one;
And I forget the inevitable gulf
That set you high as ever the lark beat
Her restless wing—and me so low! 'Tis strange
That all my mind should pant for utterance
And press upon the bars of flesh and blood,
Consume itself in agony when comes
The fiery exaltation of the morn,
And the intoxicating tide of life
At the last ebb of spring; that all this storm
And tumult should convulse my soul, and you,
You only have the power to comfort me;
The hand to lead me to a quiet grove
Where the birds' song, and the long amber sunbeams
Teach me new life, frustrate the old,
Hard, obdurate laws that bound me—make me live
As the slight things of earth, that can be glad.
I am a bird tossed in the glorious heavens,
A quivering leaf upon a sun-bound branch,
Or a salt wave betopped with foaming laughter
Rolled thundering on the sand;—aye, everything
That tingles with clear life, and an o'erflow
Of piercing rapture.—So I look to you;

O life, O love, where art thou? what is this
My hand clasps wildly in the deepening glow
Of the white moon? What is this thing? A
spray,
A cluster of pale roses, mocking me
In its pure whiteness, and memorial odours
Of things gone by. What are *you*, my belovèd,
But the great recollection of the past,
The inaugural halo of what might have been?
Nay, but I will forget it; you are here,
For I have learned me to be comforted
With the sweet spirit. 'Tis a piteous love,
This love I have so watered with my tears,
So trained it up, and tended it, that still
Through all the years a blossom never fails.
But 'tis this love, that sweeping o'er my senses
As a rich frankincense, doth raise my being
Into communion with things infinite.
Only a love remembered, and a hand
Grown spiritual with time, but steadfastly
You lead me on into those silent places
Where my soul lives. . . . . .

DAWN

IN the ecstatic madness of the first
Clear morning beam, in the heav'n-
cleaving kiss
Of floating blooms sun-nurtured into bliss,
In the pure glowing morn, I breathe as erst
Some primal wanderer unvexed, uncurst;
I live! I live! I feel no joy but this,
I count not what the world hath given amiss,
All is forgotten in the day's outburst.
O sun upon the drifting petal-rain—
Frail ships that bear no freightage but the
gold
Heart-piercing morn—I am akin, akin,
I feel the baptism of thy glorious pain!
Afar the citadels of hope unfold:
Ah! part their passionate doors and take
me in!

WHAT IS LIFE?

A ROAD whereon we climb up higher,
A drama where we cannot choose our part,
A glass wherein we see the soul's desire,
But never, never hold it to the heart.

A great kaleidoscope of wonders
Wherein the spacious facts of life revolve,
A mystery whereon the world-soul ponders
And never yet did mind of man resolve.

ON LOOKING THROUGH OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

FACES of long ago, once known and loved,
The past hath given us back a vanished day,
And ye do come about me as of old
With genial hand-clasp from the far away.
Each face calls up a thousand memories
Of pains and pleasures shared, of hopes and schemes
So lightly mused, with hearts and lips that now
Have journeyed hence beyond life's vanquished dreams.
We were companions when the rugged road
Lay long and strong before us, all unknown;
We met the day together, ere the sun
Had scorched us, or the withering winds had blown.
Ye have outstripped me, proved the latest mile,
I follow on, yet still in vacant hours
I see you in the halo of the youth,
The gladness and the sadness that was ours.

IDEAL LOVE

THE flowers love, the birds love,
And the bees go up to heav'n,
I have no love to comfort me
In the myst'ry of the even.

He wooed me, he won me,
At the first call of the day,
But all of life between us lies,
And we have lost the way.

He sought me, he found me,
In arms of scatheless gold—
The light of all the loves gone by
His knightly glance did hold.

I saw him, I knew him,
Was moment ne'er so sweet!
I yearned across the struggling world,
And the waves brake at my feet.

Afar off, afar off,
On the seas' remotest shore,
He holds his stainless banner still,
And I wait forever more. . . . .

THE LAST CALL

SHE could not see the shadows fall and flicker,
The red, ripe firelight on the ashen walls,
She looked into a dawn beyond the mountains
Where cannon unto deadly cannon calls.

There through the pallid light they bore him bravely,
There slowly o'er the ragged ground they came,
Where the lark sang, and the wild din was lessened,
Back in the sod they laid him with his fame.

And hour by hour into life's compensation
The flow'rs would cluster where the grave had been:
To her the vista of the widening future
Was vacant, for the tears that swam between.

THE YOUTH OF THE POET

He sleeps now deeply, deeply,
And the world knows nought;
Oh, he rests undisturbèd
In the dawn-dream caught.
His head lies on the by-gones,
And his strong closed eyes
Look out into the future
And its pageantries.
Now let the earth be silent,
And the first bird sing,
Oh, let the dawn break slowly
Where the east lights cling;
For he sees things eternal
In the days to come,
And all the world shall witness
Of the dream now dumb.
He looks on scattered fragments
And discerns the whole,
In the dust of flagging footsteps
He foreknows the goal.
Oh, he sleeps undisturbèd
In the great long dream,
He rests now deeply, deeply,
Till the morning's beam:
Lost in the silver silence
He receives his song,
To life and its long labour
Shall the strains belong!
In the arms of things immortal
There is slumber yet . . . .
Peace, peace, loud world—he wakens
When the last stars set!

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